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Disclosure Bill Gains Approval Of House Unit

United Press International

A "freedom of information" bill, which would open nearly all Government records to public scrutiny, was approved unanimously yesterday by the House Government Operations Committee.

Final congressional approval of the measure, passed by the Senate in October after a 10-year fight, was considered assured, probably by early summer.

The bill would establish the legal principle that every American has the right to examine his Government's records, a view contested by the Justice Department.

Security Files Exempt

Specifically exempted would be records involving national security, personnel files, trade secrets and investigative dossiers of law enforcement agencies.

In the event of a dispute over whether certain records were exempt, a citizen could appeal in court, with the burden of proof resting on the government.

The Administration does not support the bill, and there have been indications that President Johnson might veto it. But Rep. John E. Moss (D-Calif.), one of its chief sponsors, said he did not believe Mr. Johnson would block the measure.

Moss said opposition was more a reflection of the views of Justice Department lawyers than of the White House.

Called Unconstitutional

The department has said the bill would be an unconstitutional violation of the traditional separation of powers; that the subject was too complicated to be resolved by legislative regulation, and that improper disclosure of information might jeopardize the public interest.

In addition, the Justice Department sought unsuccessfully to have the bill specifically affirm the President's right to exercise "executive privilege" in withholding information.

No such provision was included, mainly because Congress never has accepted the legality of this doctrine and is sensitive about it.

Nevertheless, it was understood that the committee's final report, to be issued later, would contain language stating that the measure did not affect the principle of executive privilege.